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Lewis and Clark on the Columbia River

The Power of Landscape in the Exploration Experience

WILLIAM L. LANG

On August 12, 1805, near Lemhi Pass in present-day Idaho, Meriwether Lewis strode over a prominent ridge and descended a steep slope to “a handsome bold running creek of cold clear water,” recording in his journal: “Here I first tasted the water of the great Columbia River.” The following day, almost as confirmation of his geographic pronouncement, he wrote that he had seen his first salmon, which “perfectly convinced me that we were on the waters of the Pacific Ocean.”¹ Lewis and his co-captain, William Clark, had reason to be pleased, for they had passed into the Columbia’s orbit, one of their chief objectives from the day they had left Wood River camp, on the Missouri River near St. Louis, in April 1804. They had been instructed, in that most remarkable charge that Thomas Jefferson had sent to Lewis in June 1803, to ascertain “the most direct & practicable water communication across this continent for the purposes of commerce”: to explore “the portage between the heads of the Missouri & the Columbia” and to discover “the water offering the best communication with the Pacific Ocean, whether the Columbia, Oregon, Colorado or any other river.”²

Facing west from the continental crest, Lewis looked out on a landscape that must surely have dulled his joy, for he saw ridge upon ridge and steep, firry canyons. The hope of an easy portage between the Northwest’s great arterials

vanished in the reality of the Bitterroot mountains and the gorge-sluing tributaries of the Columbia—the Clearwater and Salmon rivers. Any lingering optimism had to be cast aside once the Corps of Discovery encountered the tough Lolo Trail that carried it across the Bitterroots and down into the Clearwater’s canyons. The imagined symmetry of landscape between the Missouri and the Columbia drainages collapsed as an idea, leaving the captains in anxious anticipation of what lay ahead, worried about how hard it would be to reach the Pacific Ocean and how long it would take. They knew something about the estuary and the lower Columbia from the maps and descriptions included in published accounts of William Broughton’s survey of the lower river in 1792. The advice, descriptions, and guidance provided by Nez Perce Indians would also ease their journey somewhat, but nothing prepared Lewis and Clark for the powerful effects the new landscape would have on them and their expedition.³

It is the contention argued here that an inherent power in the western landscape was among the most important factors in the Lewis and Clark expedition, that how the leaders reacted to the environment significantly influenced their perceptions of people and place, and that their writings reflected these influences. Most historians of the Lewis and Clark expedition have commented on the climate and the

general environmental conditions the corps encountered during its two-year trek across the western half of the continent, from the arid winds on the Missouri to the drenching rains on the Pacific coast. Generally, those conditions have been seen as incidental to the expedition’s experience, a kind of backdrop to events that carries a lesser importance in the scheme of things. But the environmental influences affected how the explorers interpreted places, human activity, and economic potential in the new landscapes. The environment also had a broader, even psychological effect on the leaders’ decision making, their relationships with native peoples, and the general course of exploration. The relationships between the explorers and the landscapes they encountered were especially important on the Columbia, because it was there that the leaders’ preconceptions were at greatest odds with physiographic realities. The Great River of the West surprised Lewis and Clark, bedeviled them, and tested their endurance more than any other segment of the epic journey.

An investigation of the relationships between Lewis and Clark and the environment in the Columbia River basin must address two principal questions: What was so powerful about the Columbia’s environment? and, How can we evaluate the impact the environment may have had on the explorers? Answers to these questions can suggest what meaning the landscape

had for the expedition and, by extension, for exploratory enterprise in general.

When the Corps of Discovery entered the Columbia Basin, it proceeded with some anxiety because of the lateness of the season and the Shoshoni Indians' descriptions of the mountainous terrain that lay ahead. More troubling, though, was the explorers' realization that the Columbia country was nothing like what they had imagined. As the geographer John Allen has brilliantly explained, Lewis and Clark journeyed west with very limited cartographic information about the upper Missouri and Columbia river systems but with a powerful belief in a contrived geography that led them to expect the western side of the Continental Divide to mirror the eastern side.⁴ The Columbia, they anticipated, would flow west through an open landscape of gradual elevations and temperate climates. Lewis had been so confident of this landscape that he had written his mother from Fort Mandan on the Missouri in March 1805 that the expanse between the two great rivers was "a distance not exceeding half a days march."⁵ That half day's march stretched into weeks and included a starvation-threatening trek over the Lolo Trail, the section that Gary Moulton has called the "severest test of the whole expedition."⁶ Not only had Lewis been wrong about the length and difficulty of the course through the mountains, but he had also misjudged the geography of the Columbia.

As the western traveler Samuel Bowles later expressed it, the eastern half of North America "offers no suggestion of its western half."⁷ That characterization applies even more to the Missouri and the Columbia; the dissimilarity of landscape forced Lewis and Clark to change plans and adapt to environmental conditions. First, the steep-canyoned courses of the Salmon and Clearwater rivers abolished the idea

that the expeditionary force could float down the tributaries to the Columbia. Second, once on the Snake River, the leaders found a sere, treeless landscape and dangerous water, conditions quite unlike the upper stretches of the Missouri and its tributaries in Montana. The captains logged 29 troublesome rapids in 154 river miles on the Snake.⁸ Third, between the mouth of the Clearwater—at present-day Lewiston, Idaho—and the Pacific, the expedition traveled through a succession of ecological zones that were surprisingly disjunctive, from high, semiarid plateau to one of the wettest temperate rain forests in the Western Hemisphere. Midway in their descent of the Columbia main stem, the explorers encountered an especially sheer cleavage between abutted environments. Where the river constricts, drops over a series of fractured and precipitous rapids, and runs swiftly through a cut in the Cascade Range, the expedition crossed one of the great climatological dividing lines on the globe. In just 25 miles, precipitation varies between 15 inches per year to more than 70. Finally, the expedition had to paddle strenuously downriver, battling strong winds and drenching rains to reach the Pacific, where the men spent the winter grimly contending with the soggy climate.

In addition to the differences between the physiographies of the two great river systems, it is important to remember that Lewis and Clark ascended the Missouri and descended the Columbia. Unlike the Missouri, which ascends sharply only at its uppermost reaches, the Columbia and Snake rivers fall steadily from their high-elevation sources to the sea. The expedition cordelled and even sailed up the Missouri, but it dropped down the Snake and Columbia. For most of the Columbia's 1,210-mile length, it is a mountain river, falling more than three feet per mile. The upper reaches of the Missouri include mountain miles, but most of its course is lazy

compared to the Columbia's. Lewis underscored these differences in the widely publicized and optimistic report he wrote to Jefferson at the conclusion of the expedition. Assessing navigability, he described the Missouri as "safe and good; its difficulties arise from its falling banks, timber imbedded in the mud of its channel, its sand bars and steady rapidity of current." His portrait of the Columbia and its tributaries, however, detailed three portages on the Snake River and three more on the Columbia—one "1200 paces" in length, two others more than two miles long—and one section, the Long Narrows, that "could be advantageously navigated with large batteaux, and . . . perogues."⁹ The falling waters of the Columbia had left an impression on the Corps of Discovery.

We can judge the impression the Columbia's environment made on the explorers by carefully reading their expeditionary writings. Fortunately for historians, Lewis and Clark documented their journey in staggering detail and at great length. Their writings fall into three large categories that bear directly on an investigation of their reactions to the environment. The captains wrote daily journal entries about events and their reactions to them, often within days of the occurrences. They also recorded "Course and Distance" descriptions that included brief recountings of events, physiographic descriptions, observations of flora and fauna, and scientific measurements of their geographical position, climate, and the like. They compiled a congeries of data in the form of "Miscellany" and separate field notes, which entail extended descriptions, numerical lists, and details of their linguistic and cultural studies. How to read this material and what questions to ask of it have challenged Lewis and Clark scholars for generations. From one angle, it is a literature of adventure that is peppered with dramatic episodes and bold depictions of place, such as Lewis's famous account

of the fight with Indians on Two Medicine River or of Sacagawea's meeting her brother Cameahwait. Central to these and other narratives is the leaders' role as participant-observers. They were part of the story. There was a focus on physical acts and personal engagements in the *Journals*, Albert Furtwangler has recently explained, because Lewis and Clark had to "write themselves in their journals" as part of a plotted narrative. That narrative comprised the exploration enterprise, its outline and purpose, and the discoveries of new lands, new men, and new biota that Jefferson expected Lewis and Clark to make. The captains, in short, went out prepared to find what they sought.¹⁰

The suggestion here is not that the captains' journal writing was contrived but that there was focused purpose in it, which demanded a literary ordering of events and the conclusions drawn from them. Lewis and Clark did not invent the form or purpose of such journal writing. By the time they took to the field, exploration narratives had already become a literary genre. Several, such as James Cook's *Voyage to the Pacific Ocean*, Samuel Hearne's memoir of exploration in the Arctic, and Alexander Mackenzie's great *Voyages*, had influenced Jefferson, Lewis, and other Americans interested in exploration. The structure of those great narratives clearly expressed the goals of those explorations, and the writers framed their descriptions expressly as depictions of significant accomplishment under difficult conditions and in the face of considerable obstacles. They related their stories of acquiring knowledge in a comprehensible language, one imbued with empirical integrity, but also in a form that took the reader "close enough to an unfamiliar reality to obtain some insight into it, without getting so close as to be completely absorbed." Describing the "other" and retaining distance from it, as Bruce Greenfield has argued, is the essence of the exploration narrative's

artifice.¹¹ Lewis and Clark's story line follows this general form: native peoples personify the "other," and the plot portrays successful interactions between the explorers and the Indians resulting in a range of discoveries and the acquisition of knowledge. Seen in this light, as James Ronda has concluded, the expedition was not a story of conquest or domination but a narrative about an epic encounter in which "Indians and explorers stood together in the rituals . . . that united strangers."¹²

Lewis and Clark's discoveries were not the result of a cooperative effort that included Indian participants. Although they learned from Indian informants, the captains came to the West as visitors and observers. Their perspective on place was quite distinct from the native viewpoint. The difference was partly a matter of purpose—Lewis and Clark came to investigate a new land—and partly a consequence of how the explorers looked at the landscape. As the cultural geographer Yi-fu Tuan has explained:

The visitor has a viewpoint . . . his perception is often a matter of using his eyes to compose pictures. The native, by contrast, has a complex attitude derived from his immersion in the totality of his environment. The visitor's viewpoint, being simple, is easily stated. The complex attitude of the native, on the other hand, can be expressed by him only with difficulty.¹³

As visitors in the Columbia country, Lewis and Clark adhered to their prescribed mission to record what they saw as accurately and clearly as they could. They did that admirably in an empiricist and materialist language. Their goal was the direct and explicit description Tuan calls "simple," because it records the obvious and what has relatively little nuance. The statistical measurements in the "Course and Distance" records are examples, such as notations of mileage traveled, obstacles encountered, and precise geographical locations. They characterize Tuan's "visitor's viewpoint." In addition,

the explorers cataloged flora and fauna in copious quantity following the Linnaean system of classification, on which they carried six reference works. They also painstakingly depicted what they saw in drawings and maps. The overwhelming mood of the captains' writing communicated their desire to control their descriptions, as if to bring the environment under some sort of logical management.¹⁴

A comparison of the explorers' two journal modes, one reflecting the adventure inherent in moving through a newly discovered landscape and the other laying down precise observations of the natural world, suggests a paradox. In the first, Lewis and Clark are intimately engaged in the story of discovery, depicting interactions with native people and explaining the strategies they use to overcome obstacles. In the other, they are removed from the action and play the role of scientific observers, describing plants and animals according to the Linnaean system, the recently adopted method of classifying the world's biota. They moved easily between the two roles, often in the same passage. Like other enlightened observers of the natural world, Lewis and Clark incorporated both modes in their writing. They followed the model of natural histories written during the 18th century, a form one scholar has called a "literature of place,"¹⁵ which melded travel literature with the scientific classification of the landscape. There is also congruity in the two modes. Cataloging a new place using the Linnaean method was understood as "a step towards the completion of a systematic structure" of the world that science had already proposed.¹⁶ Similarly, the captains' description of their process of discovery fulfilled their instructions from Jefferson, completed an exploration schema that had been broadly laid out before their departure.

This congruity of modes in Lewis and Clark's writing, however, did not mean

that their narrative was seamless. More than the obvious switching between storytelling and scientific notation, their writing reveals a genuine distance between the explorer-observers and the landscape they encountered. That distance included their relationship with native peoples and their perspective on the environment. There are two aspects of that distance that are important to note in the explorers' sojourn in the Columbia River basin. First, in the area between the observer and the landscape—the region of correspondence between the two—the physical presence of the environment stimulated a range of reactions and adjustments in the explorers' relationships to the landscape. The landscape exerted a power over the explorers that affected how they perceived themselves and the environment. Second, there was a worrisome concern about their relationships with Indians on the Columbia River. Increasingly, as a result of contact between themselves and Indians, they fretted about everything from the safety of their goods to the condition of their health. The concern bordered on a species of fear, one that Frederick Turner has labeled a “fear of becoming *possessed*, possessed by the wild peoples, yes, but also, more profoundly, by the wilderness and its spirits.”¹⁷

The landscape contained an intrinsic power in its physiography, its challenge to movement, and its inclusion of forms and things new to the explorers. It struck them from their first days in the Columbia Basin. Just as they entered the watershed, for example, Lewis read the terrain and the physical warning inherent in the Salmon River, where “the sides of the mountain are very steep, and the torrents of water which roll down their sides at certain seasons appear to carry with them vast quantities of loose stone in the river.”¹⁸ At the Long Narrows, where the river constricts to pass through the Cascade mountains, Clark “heard a great roeing” and investigated that slotted passage where the

“great river is compressed into a Chanel between two rocks not exceeding forty five yards wide.” He described that stretch of water as an “agitated gut swelling boiling & whorling in every direction.”¹⁹ Farther down, at the mouth of the Sandy River, he marveled at the tributary's power: “We found [the river] to be a verry considerable stream discharging its waters through 2 channels . . . [with] corse sand which is thrown out of this quick sand river compressing the waters of the Columbia and throwing the whole current of its waters against its northern banks.”²⁰

Still farther downriver, in the section that had been charted by the English mariner William Broughton more than a decade earlier, the combination of a broad and rough river course and inclement weather beat on the expedition. The captains seemed to be engaged in a battle with the environment. They encountered a river much tougher than the one Broughton had described in 1792, one that forced the captains to adjust and readjust their strategies and course. After days in struggle against the Columbia's strength, the corps' relationship with the river had become a contested one. “The tide was 3 hours later to day than yesterday and rose much higher,” Clark wrote on November 11, 1805:

The trees we camped on was all on flote for about 2 hours from 3 until 5 o'clock pm, the greatest quantities of rain which has fallen loosens the stones on the side of the hill and the small ones fall on us, our situation is truly a disagreeabl one our Canoes in one place at the mercy of the waves our baggage in another and our Selves & party Scattered on drift trees of emece Sizes.²¹

Four days later, he wrote in frustration, almost angry at the environment's dominance over the Corps of Discovery: “The rainy weather continued . . . eleven days of rain and the most disagreeable time I have experienced. Confined on a tempest coast wet, where I can neither go out to

hunt, return to a beter situation, or proceed on: in this situation have we been for Six days past.”²²

An abiding sense of environmental power runs through Clark's journal entries on the Columbia. Lewis's reaction to these conditions are unknown. He recorded only a few entries between April 1805 and January 1806 and none on the descent of the Columbia. In his partner's descriptions, however, we can still gauge the general influence the environment had on the expedition, for in them Clark often writes as if he is speaking for everyone.²³

Part of Clark's imagery depicts the physical strength of the river's current, and part of it depicts the physical ordeal that he and his fellows endured in portaging at Celilo Falls, plunging through the volcanic-sided chutes at the Long Narrows, and battling the waves in Baker Bay. The connection between the explorers and the Columbia environment is palpable, and there is an inescapable sense of strained engagement, especially after they left the Nez Perce camps on the Clearwater River in September and ran the cata-racts of the Snake. Once in the Columbia plateau country, where the combination of wind, direct sun, and treacherous currents complicated travel between the mouth of the Snake River to the Cascades, the explorers became more and more wearied. They reacted negatively to the unexpected aridity that increasingly narrowed their range of foods. The lack of trees made matters worse, for there seemed to be no escape from the sun's heat, even though they were traveling during the later summer season.

The Columbia's environment seemed to put the explorers on edge the farther west they traveled. A measurement of this condition can be seen in their estimate of resources on the Columbia. They could not find fuel for cooking fires, for example, and they chafed at

the paucity of food, even though Indian families willingly offered them supplies. They had been accustomed on the Missouri to an adequate supply of meat, even an abundance in some locations. But once on the Snake and Columbia rivers, they could get little meat, only fish. The Plateau Indians who fished there relied on the plentiful annual runs of anadromous fish—especially the chinook and coho salmon—netting and spearing thousands of pounds during the spring and summer months. Lewis and Clark arrived too late to see the biggest runs, but they did see the extensive drying sheds and the enormous volume of salmon the Indians cached for winter use. When natives offered the explorers fish at the mouth of the Snake River, for example, Clark declined, worried that the food was spoiled. “We had every reason to believe,” he wrote on October 18, “[the fish] was taken up on shore dead, we thought proper not to purchase any, we purchased forty dogs for which we gave articles of little value.”²⁴ We can only wonder what the Yakima Indians must have thought when the visitors turned down salmon for dogs.

The contention they felt with the environment affected their view of the natives’ quality of life and culture and, by extension, the effect the environment might have on themselves. Their descriptions of the people they encountered on the Columbia parallel their critique of the landscape. Clark wrote of the Indians’ apparent “comparative happiness” and their veneration of the elderly, but he sharply criticized their physical condition and health, especially the women’s. People suffered from “sore eyes” and even blindness, which seemed to Clark to be a result of living “in this open country where the eye has no rest.” He found further proof of the harshness of living conditions in “their teeth worn to the gums,” probably from “sand attachd. To the roots & the method they have of using the

dri’d Salmon, whil mearly worming it and eating the rine &c Scales with the flesh of the fish.”²⁵

It is clear that Lewis and Clark’s judgment of the environment came from their observations as they cataloged flora and fauna and wrote about the characteristics of the native peoples they encountered. Their writing reflects how easily they saw the environment through their perceptions of the people, and likewise how their views of the people became influenced by their own experiences in the landscape. Nonetheless, their inner feelings are rarely noted, in part due to the character of their mission—it was a military-style expedition under specific rules of conduct—and the purpose of the *Journals*, which were intended to be an official and scientific record. Still, there are more than hints of how Lewis and Clark felt about their descent of the Columbia. One way to discover their veiled feelings is to recognize that landscapes, as the cultural geographer E. V. Walter has reasoned, are “a location of experience,” that “a place has no feelings apart from human experience there.”²⁶ Those feelings are embedded in the relationship between human experience and the physical landscape. Although that relationship resists easy analysis, the historian Morris Berman posits that a “visceral approach to history” can coax out the hidden data in human experience. His suggestion is to integrate “the mind and body” in descriptions of events.²⁷ Using Berman’s approach, we might ask what kind of emotional and psychological reactions Lewis and Clark had to the Columbia and its environment and whether those reactions were different from those associated with other episodes during the expedition.

After negotiating a series of dangerous rapids near the mouth of the Umatilla River, the explorers came upon a group of natives along the south bank of the Columbia. In the context of earlier relationships with Indian groups, this

occasion marked what Ronda has labeled a “sudden shift in native attitudes”²⁸ toward the explorers, which created one of the most mysterious episodes in the entire journey. Walking down the shore toward an Indian encampment, Clark shot a crane on the wing and later advanced on a lodge, where he found

32 persons men, women and a few children Setting permiscuesly . . . in the greatest agutation, Some crying and ringing there hands, others hangingg their heads. I gave my hand to them all and made Signs of my friendly dispotion and offered the men my pipe to Smok and distributed a fiew Small articles which I had in my pockets.²⁹

Ronda explains that Clark later said that the Indians were convinced that the white explorers were from the “clouds” because of the sudden and inexplicable killing of the crane by unknown means.³⁰ What is important in Clark’s description, however, is a disagreement between the diary entry, which is dated October 19 and was probably written a day or two later, and the “Course and Distance” record, which covered the same events but was likely written at the time and *before* the journal entry. In the “Course and Distance” description, Clark describes the events in reverse order and then adds a disturbing additional comment:

I went on Shore . . . landed at the first 5 lodges, found the Indians much fritened, all got in to their lodges and Crying . . . I took all by the hand . . . I gave a string of Wampom to the Principal man, we dined on dried Salmon & Set out. I am confident that I could have tomahawked every Indian here.³¹

Clark sanitized his journal entry. Why? And what could have precipitated his expression of such a violent thought? We cannot know what was in his mind; we do know that he decided not to repeat his shocking comment. By itself, it stands as an expedition anomaly, a curious incident of either bragadocio or perhaps an unfulfilled but genuine threat.³² More likely it was an expression of Clark’s frustration, perhaps at the demeanor of the Indians,

which his description seems to imply. It could also be that his frustration went deeper than, and his expression beyond, the incident in the lodge. The experience on the Columbia could well have begun to take its toll on him, and in a sense he could have begun a process of losing control of the environment. The environmental conditions and his reaction to them, in other words, had become sufficiently disturbing that his confidence in the expedition's safety and ability to contend with the place had become shaken, an ironic reaction to the passivity of the Indians.

This interpretation gains strength as we scrutinize the explorers' accounts from deeper in the Columbia world. Downriver some distance from the Umatilla and after a difficult portage at Celilo Falls, where there had been tense moments between expedition members and Indians who freely purloined the men's gear, the captains faced one of the most difficult passages on the river. Peering into the compressed torrent at the Long Narrows, they seemingly stared down the "horrid appearance of this agitated gut" and "determined to pass," as Clark recorded, emerging "safe to the astonishment of all the Inds: of the last lodges who viewed us from the top of the rock."³³

Again, we might ask why the captains made this choice to plunge into the roiling waters. Clark explained that "portage was impracticable with our large Canoes." So they decided to portage the goods and attempt the channel in the boats. One canoe nearly swamped in the process, but Clark nonetheless "felt my Self extreemly gratified and pleased" at their success. They had taken precautions by fixing ropes "to throw out to any who Should unfortunately meet with diffiuelty in passing through," but it did not seem to occur to them to use ropes to control their passage, a method they had used on several previous occasions. It

might well be, though, that they purposefully braved the danger in order to impress the "great number of Indians viewing us from the high rocks under which we had to pass."³⁴ The day before, the captains had heard that downriver Indians may have been planning an attack on the corps, a possibility that may well have stimulated the explorers to display their courage and to establish their own combativeness both with potential Indian foes and with the environment.

Once beyond the dangerous passages in the Columbia River gorge, the expedition entered known waters, the section that Broughton had charted in 1792. The region, humid and almost pastoral, portended few or no difficulties. From the mouth of the Sandy River to the estuary—a distance of more than 100 miles—the river dropped less than 100 feet. What the captains could not have anticipated were the autumn conditions on the lower river, which blasted them relentlessly for days as they worked hard to reach the ocean. The journal entries describe a continual battle. The beating they took at "Point Distress," Clark's name for Point Ellice, pushed the men nearly to the breaking point. They could find no sanctuary to protect themselves, and they worried about their provisions, hoping for "the arrival of a vestle from whome we can precure goods" once they struck the ocean. Near the end of their journey westward, Clark seemed to despair of the wished-for aid, for he quickly added that if no vessel came he wanted to abandon the place, speed back upriver, for "Salt water I view as an evil in as much as it is not helthy."³⁵

Clark's pessimism about the estuarial environment increased during the first weeks the expedition spent in Fort Clatsop, its wintertime post. The continuing winds, poor hunting, and generally disagreeable conditions seemed to push him to exasperation in December: "The winds violent trees fall-

ing in every derection, whorl winds, with gusts of rain hail and thunder, this kind of weather lasted all day, certainly one of the werst days that ever was!"³⁶ There is little question that the entire Corps of Discovery suffered a form of deprivation inflicted on them by the environment during the long winter at Fort Clatsop, and Clark's open complaints reflected the feelings of most of the men. As they had earlier, upriver on the Columbia plateau, the explorers' descriptions of the native people matched their evaluation of the landscape. And some measure of this negative view seems to have invaded Lewis's thinking during the Clatsop winter.³⁷

During that dreary season, Lewis set about compiling information he and Clark had collected on the outward trek. When he had opportunity to characterize the native peoples, he set down a passage that has long puzzled historians. "We well know the treachery of the aborigines of America," he wrote,

and too great confidence of our countrymen in their sincerity and friendship, has caused the distruction of many hundreds of us. So long have our men been accustomed to friendly intercourse with the natives, that we find it difficult to impress on their minds the necessity of always being on their guard with respect to them. . . . we must check it's growth in our minds . . . tht our preservation depends on never loosing sight of this trait in their character.³⁸

Lewis had slipped into a "dangerous flirtation with paranoia," as Ronda puts it.³⁹ During the preceding months and even days, when two deceptions perpetrated by Indians had especially riled him, the friction between the expedition members and the Clatsops had increased tensions and fed suspicions. But in addition to these potential causes for his outburst, the steady erosion of their confidence during the passage on the Columbia had begun to take its toll. Part of Lewis's explosion of sentiment might well have been that "visceral history" that can rarely be

tied to one cause but is, rather, the product of general causes.⁴⁰

Support for such an interpretation of Lewis's diatribe against Indian character and Clark's perspective on the lower Columbia landscape comes from the corps' early exit from Fort Clatsop. Leaving at the first moment that they deemed eastward travel possible, in late March 1806, Lewis and Clark sped up the Columbia, paused for a quick survey of the Willamette River (which they had entirely missed on their descent), swiftly moved through the gorge, traversed the Snake River passage by land, and reached the Nez Perce villages on the Clearwater River one month before snowmelt in the Bitterroots. From early May to mid-June, they waited impatiently to leave the Columbia's orbit. By early July, the Corps of Discovery had made its way over the Continental Divide and into the Missouri drainage.

During the 11 months they spent in the Columbia River basin, Lewis and Clark endured perhaps the most strenuous environmental test of the expedition. More than a challenge of physical endurance and grit, their experience there forced them to rethink their ideas of continental geography and revised their evaluation of the relationships between the land and native peoples. They fulfilled their mission to catalog the environment, to draw accurate charts of the new lands, and to establish relations with native

peoples. But the cumulative effect of the Columbia's environment likely was fear of possession "by the wilderness and its spirits."

The spiritual dimensions of the landscape, especially as understood by the native peoples, seemed always to be well beyond the explorers' interest and reach. Nonetheless, it existed palpably in the ways the Indian groups they encountered lived on the land and interacted with the Corps of Discovery. The captains brought with them Enlightenment preconceptions, including the belief that a world that could be described and measured was one that could be fully understood. What Lewis and Clark experienced, especially on the Columbia, was both the immediate challenge of the landscape and the inherent spirit it contained. Some of that intrinsic invisible spirit, according to the geographer J. B. Jackson, is vested in time. "Landscape is not simply an organization of space," Jackson explained, "but also an organization of time."⁴¹ When Lewis and Clark traversed western America, they also traveled through time, penetrating to and observing an earlier North American habitation. What they saw, on the Missouri as well as the Columbia, had more historical depth than they first understood, and it was on the Columbia perhaps that they may have come closest to being pulled directly into that past. Particularly at the ancient fishing grounds at Celilo Falls and through the Long Narrows to the

Cascade Rapids, they waded into an environment that humans had successfully manipulated for millennia, yet it seemed less inviting, less appealing, and less tractable than most of what they had seen on their journey west. At the coast, the comparisons became even more pronounced.

Whether the captains gave much thought to these comparisons is unknown. They rarely speculated on matters beyond the catalog they were compiling and the answers to questions Jefferson had posed at the outset of their journey. It seems undeniable, though that the Columbia environment affected them, that they contended with its power over human activity, and that they both marveled at native people's successes in a difficult place and kept their distance. To measure the effect of their Columbia sojourn is difficult, but there can be little doubt that the environmental dimension of exploration is considerable and that studying its importance can improve our comprehension of the role of environment in human history and its specific role in the drama of exploration.

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3. Sept. 16, 1805, *Journals*, V, 209, 227-29; James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the*

- Indians* (Lincoln, 1984), 156-59. On the Broughton survey of the Columbia, see J. Neilson Barry, "Broughton on the Columbia in 1792," *OHQ*, Vol. 27 (1926), 397-411, and William L. Lang, "Creating the Columbia: Historians and the Great River of the West, 1890-1935," *OHQ*, Vol. 93 (1992), 235-61.
4. John L. Allen, *Passage through the Garden: Lewis and Clark and the Image of the American Northwest* (Urbana, 1975), 18-19, 104-105.
5. Lewis to Lucy Marks, March 31, 1805, in

- Letters*, I, 225.
6. Moulton, "Introduction," in *Journals*, V, 3.
7. Bowles quoted in Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* (Lincoln, 1979), 11.
8. For notation of the rapids on the Snake River, see "Course and Distance" entries, Oct. 10-14, 1805, *Journals*, V, 278-80.
9. Lewis to Jefferson, Sept. 23, 1806, in *Letters*, I, 320. Lewis exaggerated the distance large ships could sail up the Columbia, but he correctly emphasized the commercial potential of the lower stretch of the river.

- He also reported that the Missouri-Columbia linkage was feasible only one-third of the year, thereby emphasizing the difficulty of mountain passages but not eliminating the possibility of commercial use. When the first road between the two rivers was completed by John Mullan nearly six decades later, it was used mostly by pack trains, not commercial wagons.
10. Albert Furtwangler, *Acts of Discovery: Visions of America in the Lewis and Clark Journals* (Urbana, 1993), 5, 16, 205. See also Allen, 272-82, for discussion of the "plotted" character of the explorers' discoveries.
 11. Bruce Greenfield, "The Idea of Discovery as a Source of Narrative Structure in Samuel Hearne's *Journey to the Northern Ocean*," *Early American Literature*, Vol. 21 (1986-87), 206.
 12. Ronda, 253. For antecedents to this narrative structure among 15th- and 16th-century exploration accounts, see Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Imaginative Landscape of Christopher Columbus* (Princeton, 1992), esp. chaps. 4 and 5.
 13. Yi-fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1974), 11, 63.
 14. Paul Russell Cutright, *Lewis and Clark: Pioneering Naturalists* (Urbana, 1969), 25. For discussion of the relationship between observer and landscape in natural history narratives and the place of scientific observation, see Wayne Franklin, *Discoverers, Explorers, Settlers: The Diligent Writers of Early America* (Chicago, 1979), esp. chap. 1.
 15. Pamela Regis, *Describing Early America: Bartram, Jefferson, Crevecoeur, and the Rhetoric of Natural History* (DeKalb, Ill., 1992), 25 (qtn.), also 4-5, 13-14, 84-86, 151-59. Regis emphasizes that American natural history explorers had, "in Linnaean nomenclature, a language that could be accurately applied to [the landscape] and an overriding scheme into which its productions could fit" (p. 14).
 16. A. Lovejoy quoted in *ibid.*, 13.
 17. Frederick Turner, *Beyond Geography: The Western Spirit against the Wilderness* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1983), 236.
 18. Aug. 23, 1805, *Journals*, V, 154. Lewis had written this after receiving Clark's report of a surveillance of the Salmon River drainage, which had been prompted in part by warnings they had received from Shoshoni Indians about the canyon.
 19. Oct. 24, 1805, *ibid.*, 331-33.
 20. Nov. 3, 1805, *Journals*, VI, 12. Both at the Long Narrows and at the Sandy River, the explorers encountered environments and specific features that they had not anticipated or erroneously anticipated from information they had received from Indians. See Ronda, 160; Allen, 304; Sept. 21-24, 1805, *Journals*, V, 227-33, and Moulton, "Introduction," in *Journals*, I (*Atlas*), 10-11.
 21. Nov. 11, 1805, *Journals*, VI, 40.
 22. Nov. 15, 1805, *ibid.*, 48. Clark and his men were cloistered near present-day Point Ellice, not far from Ilwaco, Washington, on the north bank of the Columbia.
 23. On Lewis's lapses in journal keeping, see Gary E. Moulton, "The Missing Journals of Meriwether Lewis," *Montana, the Magazine of Western History*, Vol. 35 (Summer 1985), 28-39, and Thomas W. Dunlay, "Battery of Venus': A Clue to the Journal-keeping Methods of Lewis and Clark," *We Proceeded On*, Vol. 9 (July 1983), 6-8.
 24. Oct. 18, 1805, *Journals*, V, 294.
 25. Oct. 17, 1805, *ibid.*, 289-90.
 26. E. V. Walter, *Placeways: A Theory of the Human Environment* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1988), 21.
 27. Morris Berman, *Coming to Our Senses: Body and Spirit in the Hidden History of the West* (New York, 1989), 134.
 28. Ronda, 168.
 29. Oct. 19, 1805, *Journals*, V, 305.
 30. Ronda says that Clark's explanation was in response to questioning by Nicholas Biddle (p. 168).
 31. "Course" record, Oct. 19, 1805, *Journals*, V, 301-302.
 32. Ronda interprets Clark's words as a moment of "swagger" that stopped short of action, suggesting that Clark may have had some serious intentions (p. 235).
 33. Oct. 24, 1805, *Journals*, V, 333.
 34. Oct. 23 and 24, 1805, *ibid.*, 327-35.
 35. Nov. 24, 1805, *ibid.*, VI, 84. One of the reasons for the expedition's stay on the coast, besides the lateness of the season and the explorers' weariness, was Jefferson's request that the captains send documents and descriptions of the outward trek back to him by one of the ships that presumably frequented the coast.
 36. Dec. 16, 1805, *ibid.*, 126.
 37. For unflattering descriptions of Chinook and Clatsop Indians, see March 19, 1806, *Journals*, VI, 432-35; Ronda, 202-204.
 38. Feb. 20, 1806, *Journals*, VI, 331.
 39. Ronda, 212.
 40. July 3, 1806, *Journals*, VIII, 83.
 41. John B. Jackson, "In Search of the Proto-Landscape," in *Landscape in America*, ed. George F. Thompson (Austin, Tex., 1995), 48.

"On Brotherly Terms"

"On Brotherly Terms': Canadian-American Relations West of the Rockies," a symposium cosponsored by the Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest and the Canadian Studies Center of the University of Washington, will take place September 12-14, 1996, in Seattle. Presenters and panelists come from a variety of disciplines. There will be more than a dozen sessions, including Borders and Nationalism in the 19th Century; Parks along the International Boundary; Defending Alaska; Transnational Regions East and West of the Cascades; Natives and the Border; Canadian-American Fish Wars in Historical Perspective; Rivers across the Border. Featured speakers include Donald Worster (University of Kansas), Ken Coates (University of Waikato), Alan Artibise (University of British Columbia), Iona Campagnola (University of Northern British Columbia), Matthew Sparke (University of Washington), and Michael Fellman (Simon Fraser University).

For more information on the conference, contact the Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest, Department of History, Box 353560, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195-3560; cspn@u.washington.edu; (206) 543-8656.